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㉑ Microfibre web product.

㉒ A method of making a non-woven web of melt blown polymeric fibres wherein the melt blown fibres have absorbent particles introduced into the stream of microfibres after the microfibres have been extruded.

The absorbent particles are directed into the stream of microfibres whilst the fibres are in a tacky state so that the particles adhere to the fibres.

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MICROFIBRE WEB PRODUCT

This invention relates to non-woven fabrics and in particular to those comprising a matrix of meltblown polymer fibres and a method of producing these.

5 Fabric made from meltblown polymer fibre is well known and is described, for example, in British Patent No. 2006614, British Patent No. 1295267 and U.S. Patent No. 3676242. Such a fabric will be referred to hereafter as M.B.P.F.

10 Fabric of meltblown polyolefin fibres is useful as wiping cloths for oil and when this is additionally treated with a wetting agent, as proposed in British Patent No. 2006614 it has excellent oil and water wiping properties. When the fabric is also treated by a 15 pattern bonding process it is strong and durable. However, such fabric is relatively expensive when compared with disposable wipers derived from creped tissue or paper.

20 It is also known to treat M.B.P.F. to make it suitable for use as a filter. This is done by incorporating particles such as activated carbon or alumina without the use of binders, by intermixing with

the fibres. The particles are retained by mechanical entanglement with the fibres and do not adhere to the microfibres. Such material is unsuitable for use as a wiper since the particles are not sufficiently well 5 retained and would tend to "dust out" or drop out of the material if used as a wiper.

In accordance with one aspect of the invention, a method of making a fluid retentive non-woven web comprising extruding a molten polymeric material in such 10 a way as to produce a stream of meltblown polymeric microfibres, directing absorbent particles into the stream of microfibres whilst the fibres are in a tacky state so that the particles adhere to the fibres, subsequently quenching the fibres or otherwise allowing 15 them to cool so that the fibres are set and then forming or consolidating the set fibres into a web.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, fluid retentive web comprises meltblown thermoplastic microfibre and absorbent particles or 20 granules, the particles or granules being firmly adhered to the fibres by being brought into contact with the fibres whilst the fibres are still in a tacky condition.

The particles in the resulting fabric web are held firmly even if the fabric is abraded or torn when used as a wiper.

5 The particles are preferably blown onto the stream of particles shortly after the fibres leave an extrusion nozzle and the particles may be given an electrostatic charge prior to contacting the fibres which helps to separate the particles in the web.

10 The particles are suitably injected into an air stream impinging on the fibres.

Other fibres such as wood pulp fibres or staple textile fibres (e.g. cotton) may also be introduced preferably simultaneously with the absorbent particles.

15 Preferably the fibres of the M.B.P.F. have a diameter between 1 and 50 microns, with most fibres preferably less than 10 microns. The fibres may, for example, be of polyester, polypropylene or nylon.

20 A wetting agent may be added to improve the water absorbency properties. A surfactant may be added to the fibres in order to assist wetting thereof.

25 The particles, when the fabric is to be used, for example, as an industrial or catering wiper, may be of a wide range of low cost absorbent granular materials such as clay, kaolin, talc, calcium carbonate, sodium sulphate, sodium carbonate or aluminium oxide. It is

also possible to use granular organic materials such as sponge particles. Calcined clay, particularly calcined china clay, is very useful. This has a crystalline structure and produces granules normally hollow, which are more absorbent than other clay material.

5 The particles may be particles of super

absorbent material which are maintained in place by surface tack of the microfibres.

10 The particles may be relatively small, e.g. 1 micron or less up to 100 microns or larger and may be incorporated as individual particles or as cluster.

15 The particle size in one embodiment of the invention, using calcined china clay is 25% less than 2 microns, 28% greater than 10 microns and 3% greater than 20 microns. In this embodiment the clay was incorporated in a melt blown matrix of polypropylene at levels of approximately 6% and 14% and at a basic weight of approximately 90 g/m^2 . It is considered that the particle size range should be between 1 and 100 microns with amounts of calcined clay of 5 to 40%. An increase of clay over 40% may tend to weaken the resultant product whilst not appreciably increasing the absorption capacity for water and/or oil.

20 It has been found that the clay particle additive significantly decreases the product cost by

reducing the polymer content required per weight of the product.

The oil (SAE 10) absorptive capacity of the product with clay particles was found to be 1 to 2 grams 5 of oil per gram of calcined clay.

In order to increase its strength, M.B.P.F. in accordance with the invention may be hot calendered or embossed with heated patterned bonding rolls. The fabric may also be perforated as described and claimed 10 in EP - A - 0080383. This further improves the absorbency and wiping properties of the fabric.

The invention will now be further described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:-

15 Figure 1 is a partly schematic side elevation of an apparatus for producing fabrics according to the present invention;

Figure 2 is a plan view of a fragment of fabric according to the present invention which has been 20 embossed;

Figure 3 is a cross-section of one form of

embossment in the fabric of Figure 2;

Figures 4 and 5 are electron microscope photographs of clay filled fabric of the present invention taken with a magnification of 5500 and 18,000

5 times;

Figure 6 is an electron microscope photograph of a fabric having cellulose sponge particles; and

Figure 7 is an electron microscope photograph of fabric with super absorbent particles.

10 Referring to Figure 1, discontinuous thermo-plastic polymeric material from a hopper 10 is heated and then caused to flow through nozzle 12 whilst being subjected to air jets through nozzles 14, 16 which produces a final stream 18 containing discontinuous 15 microfibres of the polymeric material. This is known as melt-blown and the technique is further described in an article entitled "Superfine Thermoplastic Fibres" appearing in Industrial and Engineering Chemistry Vol. 48, No. 8, pp 1342-1346 which describes work done 20 at the Naval Research Laboratories in Washington D.C.

Also see Naval Research Laboratory Report No. 11437 dated 15th April 1954, U.S. Patent No. 3,676,242 and U.S. Patent No. 4,100,32 issued to Anderson et al.

The apparatus shown in Figure 1 is generally the same as described in U.S. Patent No. 4,100,324 with the exception of two particular features which will be described hereinafter and 5 the subject matter of that patent is to be considered as being included in the present specification and will not be further described. The subject matter of U.S. Patent No. 3,793,678 entitled "Pulp Picking Apparatus with Improved Fibre Forming Duct" is also to be 10 considered as being included in the present specification insofar as the picker roll 20 and feed 21 to 26 are concerned, as also described in U.S. Patent No. 4,100,324.

The picker roll 20 and associated feed 21 15 to 26 are an optional feature of the apparatus of Figure 1 and are provided to enable the introduction of fibrous material into the web of the invention if this is required.

The picker device comprises a conventional 20 picker roll 20 having picking teeth for divellicating pulp sheets 21 into individual fibres. The pulp sheets 21 are fed radially, i.e., along a picker

roll radius, to the picker roll 20 by means of rolls 22. As the teeth on the picker roll 20 delineate the pulp sheets 21 into individual fibres, the resulting separated fibres are conveyed downwardly 5 toward the primary air stream through a forming nozzle or duct 23. A housing 24 encloses the picker roll 20 and provides a passage 25 between the housing 24 and the picker roll surface. Process air is supplied to the picker roll in the passage 25 via duct 26 in 10 sufficient quantity to serve as a medium for conveying the fibres through the forming duct 23 at a velocity approaching that of the picker teeth. The air may be supplied by any conventional means as, for example, a blower.

15 It has been found that, in order to avoid fibre floccing, the individual fibres should be conveyed through the duct 23 at substantially the same velocity at which they leave the picker teeth after separation from the pulp sheets 21, i.e., the fibres should 20 maintain their velocity in both magnitude and direction from the point where they leave the picker teeth. More particularly, the velocity of the fibres separated

from the pulp sheets 21 preferably does not change by more than about 20% in the duct 23. This is in contrast with other forming apparatus in which, due to flow separation, fibres do not travel in an ordered manner from the picker and, consequently, fibre velocities change as much as 100% or more during conveyance.

Further details of the picker device may be found in U.S. Specification No. 4,100,324. The particular differences between the apparatus shown in Figure 1 of the present specification and that of Figure 1 of U.S. Patent No. 4,100,324 is the means 27 for introducing particulate absorbent material into the melt blown fibre stream 18. The particle introduction means comprises a hopper 28 and air impeller 29 so arranged that the particles are ejected as a stream through a nozzle 17 into the fibre mat shortly after the nozzle 12 and whilst the melt blown fibres remain unset and tacky. The particles stick to the tacky fibres and are distributed throughout the fibre mat.

The fibres then cool as they continue in their path and/or they may be quenched with an air or

10*

water jet to aid cooling so that the fibres are set, with the particles adhered to them, before the fibres are formed into a web as described hereafter.

It is also possible to introduce the 5 absorbent particles through the picker roll 20 and nozzle 23 either as an independent stream of particles or together with a stream of wood pulp fibres or a stream of staple textile fibres.

The velocity of the air stream with which 10 the particles are ejected onto the fibres, may be adjusted so that the majority of the particles adhere to the fibres and do not pass through the fibre stream.

The hot air forming the melt blown fibres 15 is at similar pressures and temperatures to that disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 4,100,324.

The set fibres and particles are condensed into a web by passing the mat of fibres between rolls 30 and 31 having foraminous surfaces that rotate 20 continuously over a pair of fixed vacuum nozzles 32 and 33. As the integrated stream 18 enters the nip of the rolls 30 and 31, the carrying gas is sucked into the two vacuum nozzles 32 and 33 while the fibre blend is supported and slightly compressed by the opposed surfaces of the 25 two rolls 30 and 31. This forms an integrated, self-supporting fibrous web 34 that has sufficient integrity to permit it to

be withdrawn from the vacuum roll nip and conveyed to a wind-up roll 35.

Alternatively, the web may be formed on a moving wire screen. The web is then further processed 5 and bonded by hot calendering, embossing or perforating, or by ultrasonic embossing.

Heated embossing rolls 36 and 37 are provided as more fully described in EP - A - 0080383. These rolls are 10 driven at different speeds and the consolidated fibre web is passed between the rolls to emboss the web and bond it. The differential speed of the rolls causes the relatively outer fibres to be in effect lifted or "brushed up" giving an enhanced thickness 15 to the web.

The embossments on the roll may extend further from the roll surface than the thickness of the web which also aids in achieving an enhanced web product.

20 Fabrics made with the apparatus shown in Figure 1 and with the apparatus shown but with the embossing head 40 and anvil roll 41 of U.S. Patent No. 4,100,324 replacing rolls 36 and 37 are shown

12*

in Figure 2, with the embossment indicated at 38
(see also Figure 5).

The primary feature of the invention is
the inclusion of particulate material into the
5 M.B.P.F. This is achieved by directing the particles
through a nozzle into the stream of microfibres as
they leave the die head, whilst the microfibres are
still tacky and the particles adhere to the microfibres
or even become partially embedded in them. Figures
10 4 to 6 clearly show that the particles are adhering
to the microfibres or have become partially embedded
in the fibres.

One preferred particulate material is
calcined English China Clay, samples of which are
15 listed below in Table 1.

13*

TABLE 1

<u>Clay Samples No.</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Clay Code</u>
1	Laporte Industries Ltd., Luton, Beds.	SKY22/44 (S)
2	BDH Chemicals Ltd. Poole, Dorset.	33058
3	English China Clay International, St. Austell, Cornwall.	ar-501
4	" "	M-100
5	" "	Superfill
6	" "	SPS
7	" "	ECR
10	" "	A1.BP
8		

Other European clays, particularly Spanish
and Italian clays, may be used.

Other particulate material such as talc,
15 calcium carbonate, sodium sulphate, kaolin, calcium
sulphate, sodium carbonate, aluminium oxide or
silica may be used.

Screening studies of the clays listed in
Table 1 for fluid holding capacity and rate of

wickability are given in Tables 2 and 3 respectively. The Tables are set out at the end of this specification.

A comparative study of results in Table 2 5 shows that for water fluid holding capacity (gram/gram) Clay No. 1 is the best followed by Clay No. 5. The remaining clays performed reasonably well except Clay Nos. 3 and 4. The poor performance of these could be attributed to the fact that the particle size 10 is well below the optimal required for water, very fine particles were lost during use, and the void volume is low. The particle size in Clay Nos. 3 and 4 were generally 20% less than 1 micron, 50% less than 2 microns and 10% greater than 10 microns.

15 On the other hand the oil (SAE-10) holding capacity for Clay 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 is good and the performance of the remaining three is not bad. Results in Table 2 seem to indicate that the lower range of particles in the particle size distribution 20 appear to have a positive contribution, due mainly to increased surface area, towards the oil holding capacity of the clay.

Improvements in the performance of the fabric in accordance with the invention is achievable by the use of surfactants such as described in British Patent No. 2,006,614. In particular, a surfactant is applied 5 to the microfibres in order to make the fibres wettable to aqueous solutions. It is also possible to include fibrous material as disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 4,100,324 by the means disclosed therein.

Granular organic materials may also be incorporated 10 and particles of cellulose sponge have been used as illustrated in Figure 6. The water absorbent properties of the sponge contribute to the performance of the fabric as a water wipe. The sponge particle in Figure 6 has a dimension of about 0.16 mm in one direction.

15 Particles in the form of particles 60 of super absorbent material may be used as illustrated in the web shown in Figure 7.

Attention is drawn to European Patent Application No. 82306269.0, out of which this divisional application 20 is divided.

TABLE 2

Fluid (water and oil) holding capacity of clays
fluid holding capacity (gram/gram)

Clay no.	For water			For oil (SAE-10)			Particle size distribution (microns)
	Atmospheric Pressure ($6.8 \times 10^3 \text{ N/m}^2$)	Approx. 3 p.s.i. ($2 \times 10^4 \text{ N/m}^2$)	Atmospheric Pressure ($6.8 \times 10^3 \text{ N/m}^2$)	Approx. 3 psi ($2 \times 10^4 \text{ N/m}^2$)	For oil (SAE-10)	Approx. 3 psi ($2 \times 10^4 \text{ N/m}^2$)	
1	2.00	1.69		0.95	0.77		+100
2	0.81	0.31		1.74	1.06		$\leq 2 - 20$
3	0.31*	0.22*		1.98			$\begin{cases} <1(20\%) \\ <2(50\%) \\ >10(10\%) \end{cases}$
4	0.32*			2.01	1.41		
5	1.16	1.03		0.95	0.84		$\begin{cases} <2(15\%) \\ >10(35\%) \end{cases}$
6	0.76	0.37		1.54	1.58		$\begin{cases} <2(80\%) \\ >10(0.2\%) \end{cases}$
7	0.72			2.21	1.39		$\begin{cases} <2(25\%) \\ >10(28\%) \end{cases}$
8	0.66			1.18	0.96		$\begin{cases} <2(78\%) \\ >5(0.5\%) \end{cases}$

Notes

1. The results of this table should only be considered for a relative comparison between the 8 different clays.
2. *Some of the fine particles were washed down with water through and along the sides of the Whatman Filter Paper No. 1.

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TABLE 3

Rate of Wetting: Wickability

Basis: 10 gram of material (Clay)

<u>Sample No.</u>	<u>Rate (Seconds)</u>	<u>Colour</u>	<u>Moisture Content %</u>
1.	13	Brown	2.1
2.	240	Off White	0.8
3.	350	Pale	2.2
4.	152	White	0.4
5. (Lumps)	724	Pale	14.4
6.	345	White	1.1
7.	240	White	0.3
8.	585	Off White	0.4

CLAIMS:

1. A method of making a fluid retentive non-woven web comprising extruding a molten polymeric material in such a way as to produce a stream of melt blown polymeric microfibres, directing absorbent particles into the stream of microfibres whilst the fibres are in a tacky state so that the particles adhere to the fibres, subsequently quenching the fibres or otherwise allowing them to cool so that the fibres are set and then forming or consolidating the set fibres into a web.
2. A method as claimed in Claim 1 in which the particles are blown onto the stream of fibres shortly after the fibres leave an extrusion nozzle.
3. A method as claimed in either claim 1 or 2 in which the particles are given an electrostatic charge prior to contacting the fibres.
4. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the particles are injected into an air stream prior to the air stream impinging on the fibres.
5. A method as claimed in Claim 4 in which the velocity of the said air stream is adjusted so that the majority of the particles are adhered by melt blown fibres and do not pass through the fibre stream.

6. A method as claimed in any preceding claim in which the web is hot calendered or embossed by passing it between heated patterned bonding rolls.

7. A method as claimed in Claim 6 in which the 5 depth of the embossing member on the patterned roll is greater than the thickness of the web.

8 A method as claimed in either Claims 6 or 7 in which the embossing rolls are driven at different speeds.

10 9. A method as claimed in any preceding Claim in which other fibres are introduced into the stream of microfibres prior to formation of the fibres into a web..

10. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which a wetting agent is added to the fibres.

15 11. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which a surfactant is added to the fibres in order to assist wetting thereof.

12. A fluid retentive web comprising meltblown thermoplastic microfibre and absorbent particles or 20 granules, the particles or granules being firmly adhered to the fibres by being brought into contact with the fibres whilst the fibres are still in a tacky condition.

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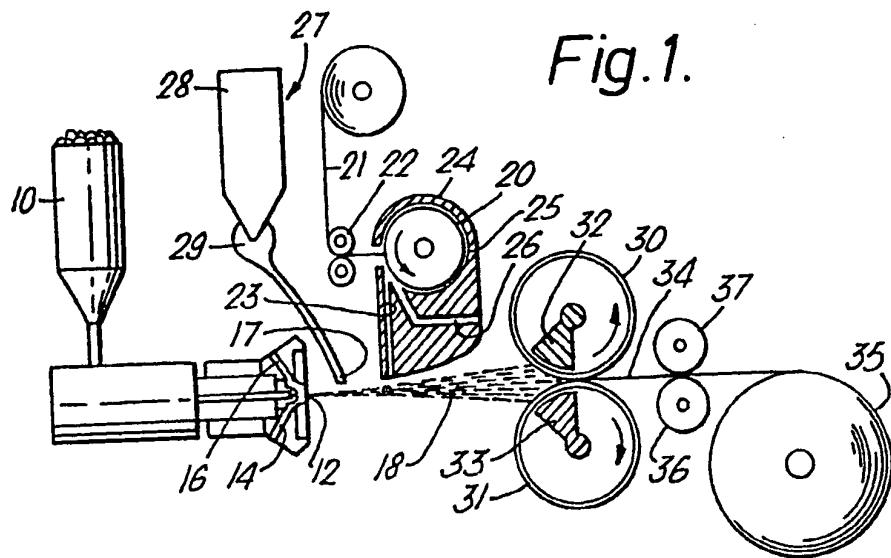


Fig. 2.

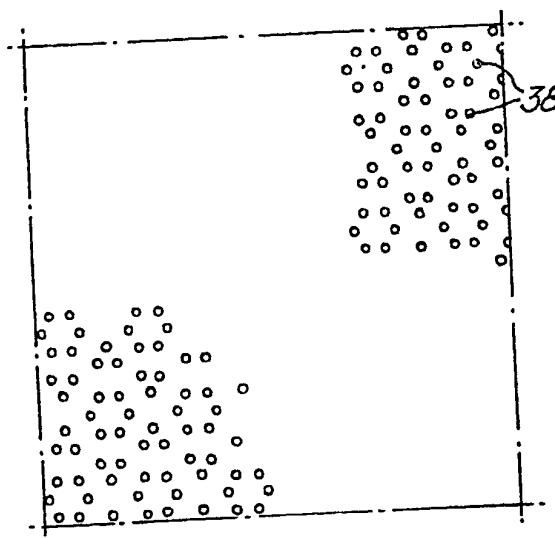
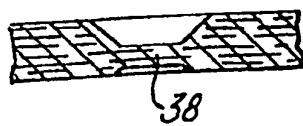


Fig. 3.



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Fig.4.



ICCL/12-80/C

5,500X
(1cm = 1.82 μ m)

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Fig. 5.



ICCL/12-80/C

18,000X
(1cm=0.56μm)

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Fig.6.



ICCL/12-80/D

550X
(1cm=18μm)

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Fig. 7.